don't just stand there by brawlite

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Summary:

Steve kisses a stranger in a club in a desperate attempt to spurn an advance from an unwanted admirer. Turns out, it's not really a stranger at all.

don't just stand there

Author's Note:

- For ToAStranger.

  feel better toastranger, i'm sorry you feel like poop.

  if you're curious, i picture madonna's *vogue* playing in the background.

  for dubious consent details, please see the end notes. there's nothing huge, but if you think that it might bother you, please check before reading.

The club is grungy, seedy, dark. Even with the endless strobe of lights and the fallacy of colorful illumination, the mass of twisting, writhing bodies is unmistakably base. Carnal. The space is packed tight, humanity and sweat spilling out into the gills. It overflows into the darkest of corners, into the hallways and bathrooms, and even onto the streets.

Some nights, Steve loves it. On others, he hates it.

He’s still not a fan of the dark, even after what comes to nearly a decade.

But he drove all the way here, into the heart of Indianapolis, to come to a place so flush with people he can barely breathe. It seems like a waste to go crawling back to a hotel alone already. Or, if he grabs a convenience store coffee, to brave the long drive all the way back to Hawkins.

Some nights, the close darkness of the club reminds him too much of the tunnels that wind underneath his town.

Some nights, he just has to push through the fear.

Alcohol helps.

Steve buys himself one drink, downs it, and another is bought for

him. A tall, muscular man at the end of the bar smiles at Steve and raises his hand in a wave. Steve, flattered, ducks his head at the sight of the guy -- he's handsome, with a beard and a head of army-cropped hair -- but he's not Steve's type, so Steve looks away, not wanting to lead him on. He's a little too big, a little too beefy. Not that Steve doesn't appreciate a bit of muscle, but he prefers his men on the athletic side, opposed to pure bodybuilders -- he likes the leanness of useful muscle, likes seeing something there that's not just for show.

Steve likes an even push-and-pull when it comes to his partners. Whether they're men or women. He needs the balance, the harmony of an even playing field.

This guy is objectively attractive, but he's just not Steve's type.

The subtle lack of interest doesn't deter the guy, though.

Steve raises his eyebrows when muscles comes up next to him and leans on the bar. He's nearly a head taller than Steve, broad and huge, with a curl of chest hair peeking out from his shirt. He's a little less attractive, up close. Or maybe he's just less attractive because he doesn't seem to get the message.

"Hey," the guy says, over the pounding beat of the music.

"Hey," Steve says, and takes a sip of the drink.

Steve watched the bartender pour it and serve it, so he isn't concerned about the quality or anything floating in it. He's a smart guy and it's a free drink, so he'll take the gesture -- but he doesn't owe this guy shit, other than a measure of thanks.

So, Steve raises the glass toward the guy, in a silent *cheers*. "Thanks," he says.

"Does a drink get me your name, baby?"

It's cranberry and vodka. Steve really prefers gin or tequila. Whiskey, if he's sitting on Hopper's porch on a summer's night. Anything else, other than an occasional wine at dinner, and he's really not interested.

“Nope,” Steve says. There’s no point in beating around the bush here. Everyone’s at this club for a fun night -- wasting someone’s time seems both rude and counterproductive. Steve knows what he wants, and this tall beefcake isn’t it.

“Sorry,” Steve says, because he kind of is. If he was less picky, maybe. If he didn’t want to go home already, maybe he’d at least *talk* with this guy.

“Aw, sweetheart,” the guy says, and Steve *bristles* at the too-saccharine tone. “Don’t be like that.”

He goes to touch Steve’s arm with one of his burly hands -- but before he can even make contact, Steve pulls away. Fast, agile. Steve slams the drink down on the bartop, abandoning the free booze in exchange for his own freedom.

“Not. Interested. *Thanks*,” Steve bites out and stalks away, into the thrum of bodies on the dance floor.

It’s frustrating, trying to politely turn someone down and having them refuse to give up, like a dog with a bone. Steve hates it, hates having to tell people no multiple times, having to get hard and sharp and aggressive, just to make someone *quit* -- but it happens, from time to time. He just wishes it had happened another night, a night he was feeling more comfortable in this place, instead of off-kilter and already on the edge of panic.

Having a good time is kind of out the window already, but now that he’s pushed himself into the middle of the dance floor, he’s kind of committed to the space.

It’s mostly guys around him, sweaty and warm, given the clientele the club caters to -- but there’s a few women scattered here and there. Steve assumes most of them are either here with friends or here with each other, in both cases, they’re here to avoid dealing with men in a strange sea of them -- so Steve avoids them, not wanting to infringe on their evenings. Like his own was infringed upon.

He’s brought Nancy and Jonathan here a couple times, to this

dilapidated building with peeling paint and dirty concrete floors. It had been one of the best nights Steve's ever had here. He had been comforted and sheltered by their presence -- but they live too far for frequent trips anymore, so Steve generally has to make do on his lonesome.

After a little while, with no sign of his beefy friend, Steve loses himself to the music.

He'd prefer to be a bit more buzzed for this, but he's not. With his inhibitions lowered, he always dances better. More free, more loose -- but he's not about to get drunk now. He's a little spooked, a little annoyed. It wouldn't lead to anything good, and he really wants to keep his wits about him.

After half an hour of dancing, of swapping between partners before anyone gets too cozy, Steve's thinking about calling it a night.

He's finally ready to squeeze himself out of the dance floor when he finds large hands slinking around from behind him, settling scalding and sweaty on his hips.

"Sure I can't get a name?" says a voice in his ear, breath thick with alcohol and words too syrupy sweet for Steve's liking.

He wrenches himself away before he even has a chance to check to make sure it's the guy from the bar. When Steve turns, he's validated -- and a little horrified -- to see that it *is*.

The guy grabs for Steve again, though his reflexes are shot with alcohol and his own bulk. He gets a hold on Steve's arm, and his grip is painful and rough, but Steve slips away.

"You *owe* me, bitch," the guy hisses, and Steve does not like that tone one bit.

Oh hell no, Steve thinks.

The mass of bodies around them don't help the guy at all, pushing and shoving, making him lose his balance. They help Steve, though. Steve lets himself slide between a couple people behind him -- and then he's pushing his way out of the dance floor fast, aware, *suddenly*

so aware, that the guy is following right behind him. Lumbering and clumsy, but still right on Steve's heels. Every once in a while, the guy gets a hold of Steve's shirt and Steve breaks himself free and gets some distance between them by pushing through a particularly thick cluster of people.

He doesn't know what to do. He feels panicked, like he's being chased through dark tunnels again, after so many years.

His heart is pounding in his ears, louder than the beat of the music.

It's Madonna, he thinks blurrily. He likes this song.

Steve quickly runs through his options as he moves. He can't hide in the bathroom, unwilling to corner himself like that. He can't go outside, isolating himself is *dangerous*. He clearly can't hide on the dance floor, either.

Finally out of the crowd of the dance floor, his eyes fall on the bar. There. That's safe. Steve at least is moderately friendly with the bartender.

Walking quickly, purposefully over to the dimly lit bar, he tries to ignore how sweaty his hands are getting, how his heart feels like it's about to beat straight out of his chest.

Steve can't help but imagine the guy behind him. He can't help but imagine the pack of demodogs behind him, either. Nearly a decade later, and that nightmare is still vivid.

The bar is packed this time of night, crowded with bodies pressing against the chipping wood of it. Steve's heart drops when he spots the bartender at the other end of the bar, engaged in what looks like a deep conversation with another regular. *Fuck*, Steve thinks. He's run out of options and now he's floundering and anxious.

Steve could take a lot of people in a fight -- he's a goddamn police officer, for christ's sake. But this guy is a head taller than him and has got at least seventy pounds of pure muscle on Steve. Even if that muscle is just for show, Steve doesn't like those odds.

There's only one option left, and it hits Steve like a trainwreck when

he spots a guy leaning at the bar, looking surly in a *don't talk to me* sort of way. It doesn't look like he's here with anyone, which means that maybe*, maybe* he'll play along.

Steve doesn't get a good look at him, just gets the bare minimum from his profile: he's white, with a mop of brown, wavy hair that fades into short clipped sides. His jaw is strong and a little proud, and maybe, even with just that cloudy impression, he's attractive enough that Steve might've thought to talk him up on any other day.

Today, he doesn't get the chance. Steve's going to ruin it. He just hopes to god the guy plays along for a little while.

Steve comes up behind him and lays a familiar hand on his shoulder, trying to push his panic to the back of his throat.

Heart pounding, hammering away, Steve leans into his ear and whispers, *pretend to be my boyfriend*. The *please* is implied. There's no time for it out loud.

With that, he grabs the guy by the front of his buttery leather jacket, turns him quick, and kisses the daylights out of him.

He doesn't get immediately punched or thrown backward, which is good. Really good. And lucky, too.

Against all odds, he kiss, however awkward and fumbled it might've been at the outset, fades into something more reasonable after a couple beats. Steve can't take any credit there -- he's too worked up, too anxious. It's the guy who does it, who wraps a warm hand carefully around the back of Steve's neck, who molds the kiss into something calmer -- and a little bit heated, too.

It's a familiar thing, the kiss. The guy's insanely good at it, warm and solid under Steve's hands, which eventually soften to press palms flat against an unfamiliar chest. His mouth is hot and wet and his tongue is wicked in the way it plays against Steve's, in how this guy licks so deliberately into Steve's mouth.

Steve keeps waiting for the other shoe to drop -- but it doesn't.

The guy just kisses him like he knows Steve, like they've been dating

for months, for *years,* even. It's intimate and strangely simple, like relaxing into a fantasy, into something he's had forever, opposed to finding something new in a stranger. And damn, Steve has a moment where he wishes he could just take this guy home, where he wishes he hadn't ruined his chances by asking for something so brutally absurd.

Gentle fingers slip into Steve's hair, coaxing a little bit more anxiety right out of him, draining it with each shivering breath that falls out of Steve's chest. He shakes a little, heat pooling in his gut with the way this man touches him like he's something precious, something to be treasured.

The other guy is gone. Steve knows it instinctively; he doesn't even have to check for confirmation. Anyone would've been deterred by the way Steve is kissing this man, passionate and effortless and hot -- there's just no room for anyone else.

Selfish and a little greedy, Steve kisses this stranger for way too long.

The club fades away around him and so do any thoughts of his pushy, handsy follower. His panic fades to a distant memory. Soon, it's just this guy and his mouth and his hands and his warmth.

But eventually, Steve has to pull away, has to face the brutal facts of reality. He wants to be able to make it out of the club and hightail it back to a hotel to sleep off his anxiety, his uneasiness with the world. Hell, he wants to *thank* this guy.

So, Steve winds down the kiss into something more subtle, more chaste. He savors it for one last second, and then he pulls back, eyes blinking open to focus on a devilishly handsome face. A *familiar* face.

It takes Steve a second to place the stranger, brain reeling and a little slow and foggy from their heated kiss. But when Steve does, when all the connections spring to life like a circuit board, his heart nearly stops dead in his chest.

Steve had only gotten the briefest of looks at the guy's profile, before. Steve didn't think -- he never thought --

-- Steve never once assumed he'd see *Billy Hargrov*e again in a million years, not to mention in a place like this.

Billy Hargrove in a gay club. Who would have guessed?

Steve knows he's staring, open mouthed and wide-eyed at Billy's face, at his squinting eyes and his kiss-bitten lips. He looks amused and Steve feels a little bit like he's dying. Like reality and fiction are trying to come together as one and Steve's mind is fighting it, tooth and nail.

Before Steve can say something, Billy laughs and moves his hand from the back of Steve's neck to his shoulder, sliding it from *intimate* to *friendly* -- and Steve doesn't know what to do with that, either.

"Fancy seeing you here," Billy says, like they didn't just made out for five minutes, like it's totally fine that they haven't spoken since graduation. Like Steve Harrington didn't just catch Billy Hargrove in literally the last place he ever thought he'd see him.

The music thrums loudly in Steve's ears. It's not Madonna anymore, but some song Steve doesn't know. It doesn't matter -- he's not listening anyway. He can barely hear anything over the static of his own thoughts.

Billy brushes his fingers over Steve's arm, squeezing a little. "Hey. Harrington, you okay?" he asks, and *jesus* he sounds weirdly kind. Even a little concerned.

Steve's brain is having a hell of a time trying to reconcile the Billy from his memories with the Billy that is standing right in front of him. It's like he's a whole new person.

"I think I need some air," Steve says.

"Then let's get you some."

Billy guides him out of the club and out the front door. Billy doesn't touch him, but his body heat is close behind Steve, protective and steady. He leads Steve past the bouncer and past the crowd of people waiting to be let inside.

They end up an easy few paces away from the door, still under the well-lit halo of the club's lights, still well within the protection from the street's darkness. Steve presses his back up against the cool brick of the building and takes a long breath of fresh air. It smells like the city, like grime, like cars, like people. Hawkins smells like fresh air, like farms, like trees. Steve always misses it, when he leaves.

"Better?" Billy asks from beside him.

When Steve lets his eyes fall back on Billy fucking Hargrove, the man is smoking, leaning against the wall and looking at Steve with curious eyes.

"Yeah," Steve says, a bit out of breath.

He blinks and thinks, briefly, that he's dreaming. That Billy couldn't possibly be here in front of him, not only tangible, but very *definitely* tangible. Steve just spent a lot of time exploring that reality, proving it with his hands and his lips and his tongue.

"Jesus," Steve says, dropping his gaze to his feet, hands running through his hair a couple times before he turns his gaze back on Billy.

Billy is just as tall as he was before. Still very fit, still handsome -- but there's something softer about him, something more relaxed. He doesn't look like he's on the razor's edge of snapping; instead, he looks like he's finally comfortable in his own skin. No posturing, no threat of violence underneath the surface -- he's a very different Billy Hargrove than the one that knocked Steve out at Jonathan's and barely ever spoke to him again.

"I can't *believe* --" Steve says, and then chokes on the laugh that falls from his throat.

Billy laughs, too. His hand finds Steve's shoulder again, and his fingers are warm against Steve's skin.

"What are the chances, right?" Billy says.

Steve watches Billy as he runs a hand through his hair. The shorter hair is a good look on him. Steve never thought he'd see anything close to a clean-cut Billy Hargrove. "Jesus," Steve says again.

“Nah, just Billy.”

And god, he’s a *dork*. Steve can’t help but laugh, so taken off guard, so keyed up, so relieved -- so everything, all at once.

They fall into silence for a moment, just the sounds of the city around them as Billy blows smoke up toward the sky. Steve lets himself breathe. He lets himself relax. It helps.

“Thank you,” Steve says, at the same time that Billy says, “I’m sorry.”

“What for?” Steve asks, before he can stop himself. After all, Steve was the one who sprung a random kiss on Billy with only half a second of warning. It wasn’t the most friendly gesture, despite how *friendly* it happened to be.

Billy looks at him like he’s dumb, eyebrows raised in disbelief for a moment before he rolls his eyes skyward.

“Well, that’s a loaded question,” Billy says. “Really, for everything. But mostly for breaking your face. It was a damn shame, it’s a nice face. I liked it a lot.”

“*What*,” Steve says. It’s kind of the last thing he’s expecting to hear.

Steve never thought he’d see the day an apology fell from Billy’s lips. Then again, tonight seems to just be one of those nights.

“I was a dick. A huge dick,” Billy says, and Steve can’t argue that, so he just keeps his eyes on this older version of Billy, this loser, easier version of him. “I was going through some shit. And I kind of hated you for existing. And I know that doesn’t -- make up for anything, or excuse it. But I never had a chance to apologize. And I wanted to, now.” *I didn’t think I’d ever have the chance*, Steve hears. “I’m sorry. I’m -- really sorry.”

“I never thought I’d see you again,” Steve says, before he can stop himself.

Not that he’s thought of Billy much.

Well -- that’s a lie. Maybe he’s thought about him a few times. Of the

hot guy who was a huge asshole, who Steve would *never see* again in a million years.

“Look,” Billy says. “Do you wanna -- I mean, hell, you don’t even *know me*. But,” he gestures with his head, nodding somewhere to the east of them. “I know this diner. A couple blocks away. They’ve got great pie. I just -- I thought, maybe --” the words tumble out of him until he stops, sighs, and shakes his head. “We could talk or whatever, but --. Ugh. This is stupid. I’m sorry. You were probably just out to have a good time.”

“Did it look like I was having a good time?” Steve asks, too fast, too impulsive.

Billy considers, falling quiet for a beat.

“Before I kissed you,” Steve amends, feeling his face blush. After his lips had connected with Billy’s, he’d forgotten all of his problems. “Did I look like I was having a good time before I kissed you?”

“Uh. Maybe not the best of times,” Billy says carefully.

Steve takes a moment to consider it, to consider slipping away into the night with the person who amounted to his high school bully. But he thinks of Billy’s kinder eyes and his looser posture. He thinks of the way Billy’s mouth felt so gentle and familiar. He thinks of Billy’s sincere apology and his hopeful offer for a quiet moment at a diner.

Steve thinks of the way he wanted to leave the club the moment he stepped inside tonight -- but maybe fate kept him there for a little longer for a reason.

Fuck it, Steve thinks.

“Pie sounds great,” Steve says. “Let’s get some pie.”

Author's Note:

> **dubious consent details:**
> • a stranger at a club approaches steve and will not leave him alone, even after being told steve is not interested. said stranger grabs steve multiple times.

• steve kisses a (different) stranger at a club in an attempt to ward off this creeper. he does not ask first, just kisses, with only a moments warning beforehand.

you can find me on tumblr, if you are so inclined.